

The intercultural role of literature in foreign language teaching: A comparative study (Portugal and Japan)

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I. Introduction

There can be no doubt that international and intercultural cooperation are already of the utmost importance throughout the world, and will be increasingly so as we move further into the 21st century. There are also clear signs that in many contexts the current level of cooperation is inadequate, and that people are not sufficiently prepared for relating effectively with strangers, either at an individual or societal level. In this paper, the authors will first provide some brief background to support their views that (1) intercultural competence should be a high-priority goal of education; (2) critical cultural awareness (hereafter CCA) is an important component of intercultural competence; and (3) foreign language education has a special role in reaching this goal. They will then argue in more depth that literary works represent an especially valuable pedagogical tool for pursuing this goal. To begin to corroborate the claim that intercultural competence should be a high-priority goal of education, evidence of recognition by national governments will first be sampled.

II. Governmental recognition of the need for intercultural competence

In many if not all parts of the world, the need for skills in intercultural communication is becoming more clearly manifest day by day. Among the responses to this need, even national governments are beginning to mobilize resources. This can be clearly seen in policy statements emanating from ministries of education. For example, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (hereafter MEXT) stated the following in their 2012 “Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication”:

“...globalization intensifies the need for coexistence with different cultures and civilizations as well as international cooperation. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan received much support from abroad, and every Japanese felt

connected with the world as a member of the global community; at the same time, we rediscovered the need for dissemination of information overseas and the importance of the English language as a tool to achieve this goal. ... In the modern society with deepening international competition and coexistence, it is extremely important to develop human resources for activities on a global scale through acquiring language skills and accumulating cross-cultural experience” (p. 2).

In the case of Portugal, the Ministry of Education included the following statement in the introduction to their 2003 syllabus guidelines for high school English courses:

“In the context of a plurilingual and pluricultural Europe, the access to various languages becomes increasingly valuable for European citizens, not only as a requirement to communicate with others, but also as a fundamental base for a civic, democratic, and humanistic education”.

The Portuguese document went even farther in suggesting the kind of pedagogy that would be most beneficial:

“Language learning stimulates a questioning, analytical, and critical posture, facing reality, and contributing to the development of active, engaged, and autonomous citizens” [authors’ translation]

(Ministério da Educação, 2003, p. 1)

Although conspicuously absent from Japanese MEXT directives, the Portuguese syllabus document includes the attribute “critical posture.” Various collocations with the word “critical” are now widespread in educational documents worldwide. However, the abundance of usages of “critical” and the lack of clear accompanying definitions have often left teachers in confusion over the role of “criticality” in their teaching practice, and with even less idea of how specifically to promote it.

III. Toward an understanding of “criticality”

Fortunately, several scholars have been working seriously on developing clear visions of the role of criticality in education. Specifically, with regard to language and culture pedagogy, Michael Byram did important pioneering work, which has since been elaborated on by Manuela Guilherme. Both Byram and Guilherme frame their work in

terms of CCA.

Byram's (1997, p. 53) definition of CCA is quite simple: "An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries." Two things are salient in Byram's conception of criticality. The first is that evaluation is crucial, but the evaluation must be based on specific criteria that have been consciously considered. The second is that the evaluation is comparative. By applying the same criteria to the same category of phenomenon in both one's own and the target culture, one comes to understand both cultures better.

Guilherme's (2002) elaborated definition on CCA is as follows: "A reflective, exploratory, dialogical, and active stance toward cultural knowledge and life that allows for dissonance, contradiction, and conflict as well as for consensus, concurrence, and transformation. It is a cognitive and emotional endeavor that aims at individual and collective emancipation, social justice, and political commitment" (p. 219). Guilherme adds that its development is cyclical rather than linear, and proposes operations that drive the cycle forward.

IV. Pedagogical possibilities for promoting CCA

Byram and Guilherme do not directly disagree on the pedagogical means by which CCA can best be promoted, but they emphasize different types of activities. Byram emphasizes the role of direct experience and action for developing CCA. On the other hand, Guilherme specifies a range of cognitive operations that can be elicited in classroom tasks and result in enhanced CCA. Recently, a third promising pedagogical approach to CCA has been developed by Matos (e.g. 2005, 2011, 2012), which combines some of the beneficial effects of the outside world with the advantages of individual and small group cognitive and social processes in the classroom.

V. A role for literature

Although current empirical research scarcely reflects the presence and influence of literary works in actual FL teaching practice, theoretical work has begun to draw more attention to the potential that literary texts offer to the L2 classroom (Hall, 2005; Matos, 2005, 2011, 2012; Olsbu & Salkjelsvi, 2008, *inter alia*). In terms of guidelines from institutional authorities, the situation is quite mixed.

Regarding the Japanese case, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports, and Technology (MEXT) publishes guidelines for high school English instruction,

with five components. A promising sign is that a component—entitled “Intercultural Understanding”—is found amidst other more linguistic (General English, English Expression, English Understanding) or specialized components (Current Affairs in English). Although the Intercultural Understanding component does not make specific reference to the role of literary works, such reference is included in the English Understanding component, where the subcomponent “Appreciation” can be found among different types of reading (such as intensive reading, speed-reading, and extensive reading). “Appreciation” refers to

“activities in which students watch a movie or read a novel, and come to understand what it is trying to say and get a taste of what is good about it. In these activities, a variety of forms are used, such as stories, biographies, novels, essays, articles, poetry, drama, and movies. Students should be given opportunities to write or discuss their impressions and opinions. By communicating their understandings and reactions, the students’ understanding is further deepened, and should lead to the enhancement of their love of learning” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 62).

The Japanese guidelines contrast with those in the European context, specifically in important founding documents such as the *Common European framework of reference* (2001), which gives little attention to literature for the learning of languages and cultures. Reference to literature or literary texts in the Portuguese syllabus for the secondary level is also practically non-existent. However, this syllabus, in line with the above European document, emphasizes the need to educate students critically and reflectively as future autonomous citizens so that they may actively question, respond to, and participate in society. It is our belief, however, that critical foreign language educators, who aim to examine and question dominant social and political ideologies, or to incorporate students’ experiences in the curriculum for promoting agency, may find that literary texts can contribute substantially toward these aims. Literary texts represent a powerful means to explore life’s contingencies and dilemmas. This exploration can have impact on the way students think about their lives and other people’s lives, contributing to their development of as critical citizens for an intercultural world.

As readers are invited by a literary text to actively participate in the construction of meaning, they may perceive reality through the consciousness of an “Other,” and thereby observe the world through different, often multiple, perspectives. In Bruner’s (1986) terms, reading triggers ‘subjunctivity’, whereby the reader’s cultural assumptions

are defamiliarized, making the familiar strange, and raising awareness of the constructed nature of social and cultural realities. As readers are transported to different worlds, they engage with alterity, allowing them to ‘decentre’ and recognize alternative cultural norms, at the same time questioning their own taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, literature engages the reader both cognitively and emotionally, supporting a confrontation with life in all its moral complexity, moving beyond easy solutions.

Literature thus clearly has relevance for developing CCA. According to Byram (2012), CCA “embodies the educational dimension of language teaching” (p. 9). Both Byram’s well-known ‘four savoirs’ (1997), and Guilherme’s (2002) critical pedagogical operations of analysing, evaluating, hypothesizing, comparing, questioning, and commenting (pp. 219–224) should be seen in relation to the dimension of critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2012, p. 6). These theoretical principles fit together well with classroom tasks using literature to have students develop both the cognitive and the affective components of reading in a critical perspective. As Guilherme (2002) puts it, “A critical pedagogy adopts both a questioning and a proactive stance by combining description, reflection, and interpretation with exploration, creation, and intervention” (p. 217). Our contention is that literary works are ideally suited to this stance.

To sum up this section, given the increasingly important role ascribed to intercultural learning for the 21st century, a major concern for FL teachers is finding meaningful teaching materials and classroom strategies and activities that will succeed in promoting interculturality. Thus, our arguments above were not advocating the use of literature as a means to promote mere linguistic objectives and competences, but rather as a means to promote intercultural learning and CCA. Literature is best used as engaging yet disquieting intercultural experience rather than a source of information about another culture, and it should invite discussion and critical reflection on social, cultural, personal and textual matters.

VI. The current study

As part of a larger study replicating and extending Guilherme’s (2000/2002) dissertation work, this study aimed to assess the current state of compatibility between Byram’s, Guilherme’s, and Matos’ proposals for promoting CCA in FL education, on the one hand, and the current beliefs and attitudes of FL teachers, on the other. To do this, interviews were conducted with secondary English teachers in Portugal and Japan.

1. Participants

The informants for this study were 12 secondary English teachers in Portugal (Teachers A through N) and two (so far) in Japan (Teachers O(J) and P(J)). Although Portuguese teachers were selected to maintain the balance of geographical areas as in Guilherme (2000, 2002), it was possible to interview only one male and 11 female teachers. In the case of Japanese teachers, so far one female and one male have been interviewed, both in the Osaka area.

2. Instrument

An interview protocol consisting of 15 questions was developed, with an overall goal of covering all the important themes in the scope of Guilherme's (2000, 2002) research. Within the interview protocol, one question specifically targeted the use of literature in FL education, providing an opportunity to gauge the teachers' potential receptivity to Matos' suggestions for using literary works, or indeed reveal the possibility they were already practicing some of the suggestions. The interview protocol is included as an Appendix.

3. Procedures

Each interview was face-to-face, conducted in English by the first author, with the same 15 questions in the same order. In Portugal, some took place in an unused university meeting room, some in the teachers' rooms of the informants' schools. In all cases privacy was maintained. In Japan, both interviews were conducted in cafes, with sufficient privacy but with ambient noise.

4. Analysis

The analysis was a simple content analysis of transcribed data. The two co-authors studied the transcripts independently, and then discussed the meanings that they had derived. Salient themes were discussed and eventually agreed upon.

VII. Results

We draw from individual interviews with teachers of English in Portugal and Japan to gain insights into their teaching practice regarding the use of literary texts. Our analysis of the interviews is informed by the concept of CCA and of literary texts as a means to promote it.

From the transcribed responses the question, five themes (5 R's) most saliently

emerged, as listed below:

1. Resistance
2. Reading modes
3. Roles
4. Renewed perspectives
5. Recognition of legitimacy

1. Resistance

Overall, resistance to the use of literary texts in the FL classroom reflected a minority but clearly stated position. This orientation took three forms: (1) literacy level; (2) linguistic level; and (3) prioritization.

(1) Literacy level

Some teachers were pessimistic about the pedagogic value of literary works because of perceived student inability or unwillingness to read (in any language). Two clear examples are the following;

“When it comes to literature they really can’t read or interpret. Even in Portuguese.” (Teacher B)

“The more you read the better you understand the country. But it’s a problem that students don’t read much nowadays, so it’s really difficult to make them understand that they have to read so they can understand the situation.” (Teacher C)

In the case of teacher B, reading literary texts is definitely rejected as a possibility since students lack general reading competencies. Moreover, the teacher does not consider his/her job to address these difficulties. Reading literary texts would have to take place at a “very higher level of teaching” in his/her words, which relates with the following sub-topic.

(2) Linguistic level

A vision of literature or literary texts as intrinsically signaling difficult language discourages teachers from using literary texts and leads them to settle for simplified readers (no longer literary texts) instead.

“Now and then, I take a short story... let’s say... Tobermory by Saki, but I take these “easy readers” ... you see? And get a short story, I mean, simplified for level 2 or level 3, because otherwise they would not be able to read it, you see?” (Teacher E)

One of the Japanese teachers also uses this strategy:

“The students in the Global Course even read *Wizard of Oz* this past term—not the original books but simplified versions published by Oxford University Press” (Teacher P (J))

(3) Prioritization

References of prioritization arise when teachers try to account for their pedagogic choices so as to sound like a sustained pedagogic decision.

“I think it’s rather important, but I don’t [use a lot of literature in my teaching] because, you see, we don’t have much time and if you want to get them to speak and I value discussion very much” (Teacher G)

2. Reading modes

Teachers implicitly or explicitly encourage different modes of reading. While there are many different purposes for reading, two clearly contrasting modes of reading—‘efferent’ and ‘aesthetic’—reflect very different pedagogic approaches. Aesthetic reading, implying a reaction to the experience of the text and stimulating imagination and the affective domain, is also visible in some of these teachers’ practices. Others, however, orient to more referential objectives when using literary texts. Efferent reading prioritizes referential knowledge, leading readers to focus more on the information provided by the text, thereby situating the text in a web of concepts supplied by teachers, critics, and the norms of the reader’s culture, according to Rosenblatt (1991, p. 445). Here is an example:

“When they are working on their own I just say ‘you have to analyze this short story in terms of a language form analysis of course, and you have to find the symbolism, the main ideas, the theme, what is it about, and then relate’. Of course in the first lesson I give some ideas.” (Teacher A)

Reading gives readers access to a different culture. Culture here seems to be understood in the sense of national culture, “the country”:

“The more you read the better you understand the country” (Teacher C)

A teacher-led approach is still the case when contextual knowledge is valued as necessary to ‘prepare’ the reading:

“What I do is, as I said, 90 minutes of preparing the reading. [...] I took 90 minutes of 2 lessons because I stopped in Soweto, Johannesburg for much longer than I thought, talking about Mandela and apartheid because they didn’t have those ideas. I thought they would have, but they didn’t.” (Teacher A)

This seems to be the case for one of the Japanese teachers interviewed:

“In junior high school, when they read about Anne Frank, they need to know about culture. As pre-reading, I make a video and powerpoints with cultural and historical information, and then they read about 3 pages in English, in their textbook. Then I show them the Japanese.” (Teacher O (J))

Consistent with an aesthetic reading mode, more conscious reader-response principles also emerge from some of the teachers. Texts are “owned” by each reader, encouraging multiple ways of reflecting, thinking and seeing the world. Readers, including student/readers, have the responsibility to build meanings. This power, or authority, to impose meanings is no longer located in the author. So, the following teacher marks a position informed by literary theory. Teachers shouldn’t expect young readers to provide sophisticated readings of texts, as if they were literary critics or experts. Their readings should be validated according to their maturity and their interpretations’ justifications. We all share the common experience of coming up with different readings of the same book because we read it in different periods of our lives.

“Literature is a genuine and natural way of reflecting and thinking and viewing the world, and decoding those possible millions of meanings and taking the responsibility of doing that. The text doesn’t belong to the author, but to the one who reads. And it’s not true that kids don’t understand it. They do at their age, they see with their

eyes. If they are 8 or 9 or 15 or 16 they do understand it in a different way. No problem. Literary texts offer multiple meanings and building these meanings is the responsibility of the reader” (Teacher L)

Furthermore, the teacher relies in literature’s power to impress and to communicate aesthetically (to “impress”, to “shock”, to create a “strong reaction” used below) to be able to develop CCA. The teacher is emphatic in stating the role of literature as “crucial” in developing CCA. Adding to this, affective reactions of students should be elicited.

“I love to read and read every day ...hmm...and I believe that the role of literature is really, really crucial in developing critical culture awareness. [...] I chose a story for students to think it was ridiculous,... and to react negatively. And they did, telling me: “I don’t understand, I don’t believe... [...] I want them to remember the story and the impact of the story to still exist in their mind in 10 years’ time. If we try to impress them, to shock them, to create a strong reaction, I believe that’s the way to go.” (Teacher J)

One teacher, however, seems to dismiss the purposes above and merely acknowledges reading for information. Reading in general provides readers with knowledge–“ideas”. Literary texts are found to be at the same level as newspapers and magazines for this purpose:

“Well, but it’s important that they read. They must have a basis, isn’t it? So, the ideas don’t come from nothing... so, they have to read newspapers, literature, magazines... They are very important” (Teacher G)

Reference to the reading for pleasure dimension appears as an added reason for using literary texts (besides the linguistic and cultural benefits) that maybe also accounts for the fact that learning takes place implicitly.

“Yes, very, very important and it should be...we should teach more literature in class. I think it’s a good way of students learning a culture, the language...and without ...without taking... without feeling that they are learning, you know? ... and get some pleasure as well” (Teacher H)

3. Roles

The roles that literary texts can play in these teachers' practices emerged from their answers and appear therefore rather as implicit statements. These roles may derive from the reading modes that these teachers stimulate in their classrooms but expand on those, finding a distinctive place for literature in the classroom. Three such roles emerged saliently from the data: (1) imagination; (2) criticality; and (3) empowerment.

(1) Imagination

Literary works suggest life possibilities for students' futures and by using literary texts we may offer our students alternative ways of imagining our world and our lives.

"I tend to choose pieces of literature, Jane Austen for instance... where female students can see that they don't have to diminish themselves to find what they want. Sometimes they don't understand. Sometimes years later they say 'I now know what you meant by that.' I don't plan to change the world [*laughing*]. I just plan to give them alternatives" (Teacher M)

Imagination also regards the ability to gain insights into a different historical past and society.

"I think it's a good way and it gives you the idea of what people thought at that time... it is very different from this time, so our society has developed or if the problems that happened once are the same" (Teacher G)

(2) Criticality

Reading literary texts is seen as having the potential to develop competencies in readers that will allow them to read the world afresh and more critically. Better readers could mean better (intercultural) citizens:

"[literary devices such as a metaphor are] a key, an indispensable key to read what we have around us as well" (Teacher M)

Literature can be an inexhaustible source to reflect on a number of different matters. Teacher F's "You have to criticize why" (below) seems to indicate that literary

texts are a good source for reflection, analysis, to enable critical thinking. “Why” questions definitely seem to be the most relevant when wishing to promote critical thinking. This contrasts with teacher’s A approach, for example, where the concern was with “what” , “who” and “when” questions, taking literature as an illustration of historical facts, therefore assuming a referential function (as in informative texts).

“And then you have to talk about everything else, you have to criticize why” and so, for me, literature, definitely!” (Teacher F)

(3) Empowerment

Literary texts are also used to empower the students. When using these texts there is a shift from authority (from the teacher to the students and texts) as the lesson is recentred on the students and their relation with these texts. This implies choice (students choose the texts they will be reading–“I prefer them to choose” (Teacher F) and responsibility (researching more about the texts and accounting for opinions–“why do you hate this?”–suggesting that the personal, aesthetic relationship between readers and texts is also addressed).

“It’s not the teacher is just “blah blah” there you go... just monotonous... they’ve got something there and for them, they say they hate, some of them... “so it’s ok... why do you hate this?” (Teacher F)

In this case, contextual knowledge emerges from the reading (it is no longer a pre condition as for teacher A, above) and becomes the responsibility of the readers/ students. In order to develop and establish connections and broaden the readers’ cultural background, they research those cultural, historical meanings, for example.

“so ok, analyse this [text]. What have you got to say?”, “oh... they were...”, “just go back! Go to History... do some research.” (Teacher F)

Empowering students is also done by making them feel that they are capable readers in a FL. A couple of teachers aim to motivate students to read more in English, to bring other books, thus making them feel they are competent readers: “it’s not difficult if you read English books it’s easy” (Teacher D).

Contrary to teachers B or C, above, these teachers believe it is possible to invest

in making students feel like competent readers. The following teacher selects literary texts that he/she estimates will be accessible (“small poems”, “not very difficult ones”) and makes students realize that although their knowledge of the language is imperfect and incomplete, they can read literary texts in the FL. It is important that students make contact with “other types of texts”, suggesting that the mainstream type of texts students usually deal with are not this type (probably more like informative texts).

“Sometimes I really bring some poems, small poems, into class to read to them. Not very long ones, not very difficult ones also, but to make them see other types of texts. It makes them understand that even though they know very little of language they can understand the poem if they read it slowly and understand how things work” (Teacher C)

4. Renewed perspectives

As these teachers reflect on their approaches, they mention significant pedagogical aspects that they notice. Renewed perspectives are explicitly voiced by the teachers, who provide theoretical explanations for the aspects that they discover from their teaching practice. The four perspectives that emerged were (1) reading aloud as mediation; (2) autonomy; (3) translation; and (4) intertextuality.

(1) Reading aloud as mediation

Reading aloud, either by the teacher or teacher and students together, appeared as a recurrent theme and a successful strategy in mediating the first impact of reading and entering the fictionalized secondary world of the text.

“We read the short story together. Sometimes if you want to motivate students you have to read to them. Just to hear the teacher. Then I have students read aloud too” (Teacher C)

“They think that because of the intonation I’m trying to use when I’m reading they’ll better understand the text” (Teacher C)

(2) Autonomy

Reading autonomy is valued and actively promoted with reading texts.

“[...] They work on this on their own. [...] I also am very concerned about raising their autonomy” (Teacher A)

(3) Translation

English as a subject is found to be in between languages (mother tongue and foreign/second language) and translation appears to mediate the learners' access to meanings, bridging insufficient linguistic knowledge of L2. In the following example, literature provides insights into a chosen topic, enabling cultural awareness and is seen as a valuable resource to develop it.

“And as an English teacher I thought that it could be nice to find examples of eroticism and sensuality in literature. Ok, and I picked two poems to discuss. That class in particular was not a very good class in terms of linguistic development. OK, so I had to use the English poem and the translation into Portuguese, so they could make the bridge between the English language and the objective of the project, which was to discuss sexual education. I chose one of Shakespeare's sonnets “My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun” because the senses were there in every line. The smell of the breath of the woman and the skin colour, yeah the sound of her voice and I think it was a good way to marry literature and cultural awareness” (Teacher K)

(4) Intertextuality

A natural connection (between poetry and music) is naturally brought up by this teacher who underlines the relevance of using literary texts to develop the students' CCA.

“so, I try to bring poems from different authors, specifically when we talk... sometimes I bring music... for instance, I bring blues or jazz...” (Teacher F)

Reading in English allows for cultural comparisons with Portuguese and other country's cultural experiences.

“And then we can link that with Portuguese culture with French and so on, but to begin with, it's just that” (Teacher F)

5. Recognition of legitimacy

The final major theme that has emerged from the data is recognition of the legitimacy of using literary works in the classroom. In the case of the teachers interviewed for this research, working with literary texts was legitimized by the syllabus.

“[...] the syllabus includes all this. Every kind of text. Text is in the centre of the syllabus. That helps a lot. So the syllabus makes the students read. That’s important” (Teacher A)

Another teacher illustrates how literary texts are naturally integrated in the syllabus. Instead of dealing with the topic from the syllabus using an informative text, he/she decides to use a literary text (no longer the idea of needing “extra time” to introduce literary texts)

“[...] and then instead of reading this story about burglary, instead of doing this we read Sherlock Holmes” (Teacher D)

VIII. Discussion

Despite variations in these teachers’ approaches, nearly all concede that literary texts are important material to work with in the FL classroom, and their assessment of using these texts is generally positive. However, their practices point to significant differences in the pedagogical assumptions and beliefs they hold on to, particularly when considered in relation to the principles of interculturality and CCA.

Teachers who avoid using literary texts, even though they acknowledge their importance (“Well, but it’s important that they read. They must have a basis, isn’t it?” Teacher G) look for reasons that would legitimize this position. Lack of time is one reason invoked by teacher G. Therefore, literary texts are seen as something one might add to the syllabus; they are not considered to provide an integrated means of study of the contents or necessary to reach the aims of the syllabus. However, there seems to be a contradiction concerning time management when the same teacher speaks enthusiastically about his/her personal preference in allowing more time for classroom discussion. S/he may allow students to discuss a free topic for the whole 90 minute class (“I value discussion very much. [...] I give them more time than I should, I know I do...” Teacher G), but s/he had decided there was no time to use literary texts.

Moreover, language teachers who tend to focus on form (epitomized by teacher B) claim that the linguistic level becomes an obstacle to the reading of FL literary texts. In reality, however, not all literary texts are linguistically or even textually difficult.

The minority resistant voices in the sample for this study were challenged by contrasting and more developed opinions on the value of literary texts in the FL classroom. As one teacher put it, “What is a language without literature?” (Teacher L), reflecting the position that as the best realization of a language, literature occupies an essential place in FL education. In spite of this, the positive assessments do not reflect a homogenous approach or similar practices. Some teachers valued literary texts as a ‘mirror’ of society, suggesting a teacher-led approach that features the presentation of needed background information to be related in some way to the text. An important goal of this approach is for students to be more able to understand the ‘culture’ of the country, in the sense of a national culture. Our contention is that these more teacher-led and text-centered practices do not provide adequate conditions to stimulate CCA or interculturality.

A reader-response orientation also emerges in several of the interviews, signaling a shift from teachers and texts to students in the authority and responsibility to build meaning. In these teachers’ practices, the students’ voices assume more control as they become accountable for their interpretations (“have to justify”) and reading choices. Through their deeper, more personalized involvement with literary texts, readers gain deeper insights into cultural difference, for example in the historical past versus present society, as they are encouraged to compare with their societal and cultural frameworks. When students are encouraged to question and to further research so as to complement and expand on their understanding of texts, the process generates multiple ways of seeing society, our past and future, and also facilitates a sounder understanding of students’ diverse selves.

The aesthetic reading mode implied in a reader-response orientation implies different classroom dynamics and the need to give some space to students’ emotional engagement with texts. While theory on the use of literary texts has emphasized the advantage of exploring both the cognitive and the affective dimensions of reading, this latter aspect appears to be almost invisible from the interviews. References to the texts selected also appear to point mostly to canonical texts from English literature. One teacher (M) suggests that readers become aware of the fact that literature classics are timeless because their messages still provide valid readings of our world. This orientation neglects the rich and relevant possibilities opened by post-colonial, diasporic,

and multicultural literary works that now abound. Thus, the concept of interculturality, although mentioned by a couple of teachers, does not yet seem to be directly reflected in their use of literary texts.

Globally speaking, both in the case of Portuguese and Japanese teachers of EFL, a more conscious reflection and awareness of the potentialities of literary texts in relation to interculturality and CCA would be desirable, particularly in view of the explicit need to promote intercultural understanding as stated in the respective syllabuses. Furthermore, the Portuguese syllabus also sustains the importance of educating students as critical thinkers. Although the Japanese syllabus does not explicitly refer to CCA or criticality, the component “Appreciation” acknowledges a needed space to integrate literary texts in a reader-response oriented perspective.

The power of literary texts appears when readers are able to look at their aesthetic and cultural dimensions, and when readers are able to explore them personally and to relate them to their social meaning. Since only a few of the teachers interviewed seemed to be fully aware of this connection and potential, there remains much work to be done in FL teacher training and professional development.

IX. Conclusion

At a time when intercultural competence has become an explicit goal for many educational systems, in contexts as different as Portugal and Japan, it becomes increasingly crucial that FL teachers become aware of the potential that literary texts offer for developing more critical and reflective competencies, specifically, CCA.

This study provided insights into the teaching practices of some Portuguese and Japanese teachers of EFL regarding the use of literary texts. Although most of the teachers interviewed recognized literary texts as a valid and important means to teach foreign language and culture, more visible links between literary texts and interculturality should be promoted. The challenge for educators is to make student readers explore texts actively and critically, and then use them as a base to discuss cultural, ethical and political issues. As Hall (2005) suggests, “Language education should facilitate and even promote freer movement of ideas and people between communities, extending mental and even physical horizons beyond current and cultural limitations” (p. 51).

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XI. Appendix

Interview Questions

1. On a very general level, what are your highest priorities in your English language teaching?
2. What do you see as the appropriate role for culture in English language teaching?
3. How are your ideas/practices regarding culture teaching different from when you first began to teach?
4. What is your understanding of a critical approach to culture?
5. Are there any particular authors who have been useful in shaping your views?
6. To what extent do you adopt such a critical approach?
7. What do you see as the main benefits of a critical approach to culture in your teaching?
8. What do you see as the main difficulties of a critical approach to culture in your teaching?
9. What indications do you have that your students have increased CCA?
10. What are the relative roles of syllabus, textbook, and teacher in including culture in ELT?
11. Do you see a role for literature in developing CCA?
12. For developing CCA, how important is experience outside the classroom?
13. Do you have ways of facilitating such experience?
14. For new teachers, what is needed to prepare them to successfully include culture in their teaching?
15. What subjects other than English are important for developing CCA?

The intercultural role of literature in foreign language teaching: A comparative study (Portugal and Japan)

Mark SAWYER, Ana Gonçalves MATOS

Abstract

The overall aims of this paper are first to argue that literary works should have an expanded role in foreign language education, and then to explore how the beliefs and practices of secondary teachers of English in Portugal and Japan orient toward literary works. Their voices are analyzed in relation to the authors' contention that literary works can be especially facilitative in the important endeavor of nurturing students' critical cultural awareness and interculturality.

To support their arguments, the authors first provide some brief background to substantiate their views that (1) intercultural competence should be a high-priority goal of education; (2) critical cultural awareness is an important component of intercultural competence; and (3) foreign language education has a special role in reaching this goal. They then elaborate in more depth their conviction that literary works represent an especially valuable pedagogical tool for pursuing this goal.

To discern the degree of correspondence between the authors' views and those of actual secondary school teachers of English in Portugal and Japan, interviews were conducted with 12 teachers in Portugal and two in Japan. The interviews were part of a broader study, but the data presented and analyzed in this paper were responses to the eleventh interview question "Do you see a role for literature in developing critical cultural awareness?"

The most general conclusion was that although most of the teachers interviewed recognized literary texts as a valid and important means to teach foreign language and culture, more visible links between literary texts and interculturality should be promoted. The challenge for educators is to get student readers to explore texts actively and critically, and then use them as a base to discuss cultural, ethical, and political issues.